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Considering the Function of Humanistic Imagery within the Court of Pope Julius II: The Stanza della Segnatura

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CONSIDERING THE FUNCTION OF HUMANISTIC IMAGERY WITHIN THE COURT OF
POPE JULIUS II: THE STANZA DELLA SEGNATURA

by

JESSICA GILLESPIE

Under the Direction of Dr. John Decker

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to examine the relationship between Christian and humanistic themes within the four large frescoes that Raphael painted in the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican Palace. Through this examination I plan to demonstrate how the interrelation of these two seemingly contradictory themes was critical for the political aims and papal identity of the patron, Pope Julius II. I will argue that Julius commissioned the decoration of the stanza as a means of asserting his papal authority and presenting an identification of himself as the new Julius Caesar who ushered in a new Roman Golden Age. I will discuss the composition and iconography of the frescoes, the life of Pope Julius II, and Roman humanism in the Early Modern Period, in an attempt to prove that the representation and collaboration of the themes of humanism and Christianity were essential to Julius’s political strategies and identity-formation.

INDEX WORDS: Stanza Della Segnatura, Pope Julius II, Roman Humanism
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For James
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this essay is to examine how humanism and Christian ideas are interwoven in the Stanza della Segnatura, and how this relationship may have played a role in Pope Julius II’s political aims and his ambition to forge an identity for himself as a new Julius Caesar, and as a cultured pope who established a new Golden Age in Rome. Specifically, my goal is to propose a particular reading of these images that sheds light on some of the ways the cycle and the stanza worked for Pope Julius II. I do this by examining how Raphael, his patron, and his patron’s advisor reconciled the principles of humanism and other philosophies with the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church within the imagery of the frescoes. Ultimately, I examine the assimilation of Christian and humanistic themes within the frescoes, and determine how these themes serve as potential indicators of how Julius thought of himself and wished to be regarded by others. I demonstrate how the classical and Christian imagery work together and support one another, and how this was critical for Julius II’s aims. Scholars have previously explored the relationship between Christianity and humanism within the stanza, but not with specific regard to Julius’s social and political aspirations. In this paper, I argue that Pope Julius II wanted to create an image of “his” Rome – a grand cultural and intellectual epicenter that was essential to his view of Christianity. I also propose that he wanted to create an identity for himself, using the Stanza della Segnatura, as the new Roman Emperor who successfully balanced both Christian and secular needs, in the same manner that the Christian and humanistic themes harmonize within the stanza’s frescoes.

I begin my essay with a general discussion of the Stanza della Segnatura, considering the room’s intended purpose as a library or study for the pope. I go on to describe the layout of the
Stanza della Segnatura, mentioning the smaller ceiling frescoes and floor decorations, to provide an overall account of the room so that I can demonstrate how the stanza’s imagery worked as an ensemble. My analysis of the four large frescoes is compositional and iconographical, with an emphasis on both humanistic and Christian aspects, and the interplay of both. I also touch on the significance of the types of subjects that appear in the frescoes, which range from Classical, to Biblical, to contemporary. A comparison of the frescoes in relation to one another, and in relation to the ceiling frescoes, is informative for discovering the overarching themes of the Stanza della Segnatura. It is also fruitful to compare a contemporary work, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which was painted by Michelangelo. By comparing these two bodies of work – both of which were commissioned by Julius, executed in the Papal Palace, and completed within roughly the same time period by two completely different artists – I glean additional information about how artists and intellectuals reconciled humanist thought with sixteenth-century Catholicism. Specifically, this comparison allows me to draw more justifiable conclusions about the manner in which Julius attempted to form his identity as a cultured pope who was responsible for creating a grand new Rome that was based in Christianity but cognizant of classical scholarship.

In order to understand how the frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura functioned for Julius II, it is essential to consider the pope’s biography. I discuss his education, familial ties, and political relationships in order to demonstrate the importance identity-formation and reputation had for him. It is significant that he wanted to portray himself as a cultured pope, the initiator of a new Golden Age, as this seems to counteract the image he gains as the “Warrior Pope” in historical texts. This examination of the pope’s life serves to determine what motives Julius may have had when he commissioned the Stanza della Segnatura, and how the
assimilation of Christian and humanist themes within the artworks fit into his political goals. A
brief discussion of Julius’s personality reveals he was strong-willed and insisted on doing things
himself, which indicates that he was likely an active participant in the planning of the *Stanza
della Segnatora*. Finally, I look at the development and characteristics of Roman humanism in
the early modern period in order to understand the culture in which the frescoes were
commissioned and created. Such a discussion of humanism is necessary for identifying various
iconographical themes within the frescoes, and for comprehending how humanism was important
for Julius’s career goals and identity formation.

Previous scholars have examined the relationship between humanism and Christianity
within the *Stanza della Segnatura*, but not specifically with regard to Julius’s political and social
goals.¹ Christiane L. Joost-Gagnier’s work, *Raphael’s Stanza Della Segnatura: Meaning and
Invention*, advances the idea that the designer of the program was Julius’s chief librarian,
Tommaso Inghirami, and does not explore the implications the frescoes’ subject matter and
themes may have had for Julius II (with minor exceptions for *Jurisprudence*).² Christine Shaw’s
biography of Julius, the “first scholarly biography” on the pope, chronicles his life in detail but
does not pay particular attention to his affinity for the arts and humanism, dismissively avoiding
any discussion of the implications of meaning in the *Stanza della Segnatura*.³ Joost-Gaugier’s
review of Shaw’s work describes a lack of discussion on “the subjects of preaching at the papal
court, Roman humanism, and the global expansion of Christianity discussed in relation to
Julius’s aims and goals.”⁴ Other scholars, whose works will serve as a reference for this essay,

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¹ These scholars include James H. Beck, Bette Talvacchia, and Ingrid D. Rowland, whose work is cited in subsequent chapters.
⁴ Joost-Gaugier, review of *Julius II*, by Christine Shaw, 922.
broadly acknowledge that Pope Julius II used art patronage as a vehicle for political and social elevation, but do not delve into a detailed exploration of how the Stanza della Segnatura specifically might have worked for Julius’s aims. I intend to build on the groundwork that these scholars have laid, and work toward a more nuanced picture of the cycle by attending to the interplay of humanistic and Christian themes within the frescoes, and how this worked to Julius II’s advantage.
1 THE POPE’S LIBRARY

Pope Julius II, born Giuliano della Rovere, served as pope from 1503 – 1513. During this time, he actively engaged in the expansion of Rome’s power through physical force, earning the monikers “Warrior Pope” and “Papa Terribile.” In an effort to actualize Rome’s new “Golden Age,” Julius also commissioned many large-scale works of art and architecture. These included the construction of a new Saint Peter’s Basilica, the painting of the Sistine Chapel, and the decoration of the papal apartments in the Vatican Palace. Raphael and his workshop completed the latter of these.

The Stanza della Segnatura [Figure 1.1], as it came to be called later due to the room’s function as a Tribunal of the Curia, was intended as the pope’s private library. It is one of four so-called Stanze di Raffaello (Raphael’s Rooms) located between the Vatican’s Cortile del Pappagallo and the Cortile del Belvedere, and the first of the four to be decorated by the artist. Prior to commissioning the decoration of the stanze, Julius had resided in the living space of his predecessor, Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia), whom he bitterly despised. Not content to live in the same chambers that his detested enemy had once inhabited, the decorations of which contained “ubiquitous Borgia portraits and coats of arms,” Julius chose to have entirely new living quarters made up on the third floor of the newest wing of the Vatican Palace. Julius’s Master of Ceremonies, Paris de’Grassis, had suggested that the pope could simply remove the images in the Borgia apartments, which had been decorated by Bernardino Pinturicchio, an artist whom the pope favored. However, Julius declined de’Grassis’s suggestion and commissioned a number of artists to complete the decorations of the stanze that would serve as living quarters on

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5 Joost-Gaugier, review of Julius II, by Christine Shaw, 921.
7 Beck, Raphael, 28.
9 Talvacchia, Raphael, 81; Joost-Gaugier, Raphael's Stanza Della Segnatura, 9.
his own terms. This reveals something about both Julius’s political aims and his character. He was a man who wanted to build his identity under conditions which he himself expressly orchestrated, while also making a political statement about his pontificate as a pope who would restore the papal states and the Roman Empire to their former glory.

The designer of the actual program for the frescoes of the Stanza della Segnatura is unknown, and multiple theories have been put forth, ranging from Raphael himself, to humanist and theologian Giles of Viterbo, to Julius’s chief librarian, Tommaso Inghirami. Some art historians believe that Julius himself had neither the time nor the learning to devise such a complex and multivalent scheme alone. His patronage, however, implies his involvement in the conception of the imagery. I argue that Julius II not only contributed to the program, but also used it as a vehicle for making claims about his identity and papacy. Many art historians agree that Julius unquestionably had a hand in the design and execution of the frescoes, as “the pope’s presence, his personality, and his desires are paramount ingredients for any sensible reading of the frescoes.” Given the information we have about the artist-advisor-patron relationship in Early Modern Italy, regarding how image content was decided collaboratively and according to the patron’s desires, Julius’s participation in the project is fairly certain.

Initially, Pope Julius II employed multiple artists to paint different sections of the Vatican stanze simultaneously. These artists included Pietro Perugino, Lorenzo Lotto, Baldassare

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Peruzzi, and Sodoma. However, after hiring Raphael to work alongside these established artists, “Julius eventually dismissed the other artists – and even destroyed some of the work that had barely dried on the walls – in favor of turning over the whole project to Raphael.” A document indicating a notice of payment marks the beginning of Raphael’s commission in 1508. Inscriptions below Parnasus and Jurisprudence confirm completion in 1511, giving art historians evidence of termini ante- and post- quem for the frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura.

The Stanza della Segnatura is not a large room, measuring only 27 x 21 feet. The themes of the four wall frescoes, which will be discussed in further detail below, were standard ones for a library in the early modern period: Theology (Disputa), Philosophy (School of Athens), Poetry (Parnassus), and Law (Jurisprudence). The north and south wall, which are adorned with Parnassus and Jurisprudence, respectively, each contained a window at the time the frescoes were completed. Obviously, this allowed much less room for these two frescoes, which Joost-Gaugier believes is an indication that Disputa on the west wall and School of Athens on the east wall encapsulate more important themes. She also puts forth a compelling argument regarding the geographical placement of each wall, citing Plato and Aristotle’s Greek origins as reason to depict them coming from the east in School of Athens, and the comparison of Disputa’s western orientation with Early Christian Constantinian churches, the apses of which faced west. Other scholars point to the opportune placement of Parnassus; its hill likely was
meant to resemble Vatican hill, as the window looked directly out at it. The following examination of the themes in the *Stanza della Segnatura* will demonstrate the meticulous planning and attention to detail that went into their execution, so it is plausible that the location of each fresco may also have been thoughtfully programmed. *School of Athens* and *Disputa* embody the two most important themes – Theology and Philosophy – which I will argue are representative of Pope Julius II’s pontificate. The location of these frescoes on the two largest walls serves to reinforce this argument.

The ceiling of the *stanza* is dome-shaped, which allowed Raphael to integrate the wall frescoes more easily with the architecture of the room through the use of trompe l’oeil. He succeeded in creating an illusion in which the images appear to be three-dimensional, as if they are an actual space within the *stanza*. The ceiling of the *stanza* contains additional, though smaller, frescoes with allegorical representations of the four themes beneath them. In between these, even smaller paintings depict *Apollo and Marsyas*, the *Fall of Man*, the *Judgment of Solomon*, and an enigmatic scene called by several names, including *Astronomy*, *Astrology*, or *Urania*. Between these corner images and the central octagon that holds Julius’s coat of arms, are smaller images still. These contain eight scenes: half depict events taken from Roman history, and the remaining represent the four elements. Very little attention seems to have been paid to these smallest depictions; only Edgar Wind wrote more than a paragraph about them, but in doing so he proffered an argument which maintained that all of the images in the room worked together as an ensemble to manifest the four themes of Theology, Philosophy, Poetry, and Law. He was one of the few art historians before Joost-Gaugier to recognize this interplay between the

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24 Ibid., 79.
frescoes.\textsuperscript{25} Although scholars may have neglected to notice or pay attention to the correlation between the ceiling frescoes, the pope and learned members of his court would certainly have been aware of their presence and meaning. The juxtaposition of the mythological images with Biblical and Roman historical ones underscores the interpictorial relationship between the four main frescoes, and is indicative of the social and papal identity that Julius aimed to project.

In addition to the walls and ceiling, the floor of the \textit{Stanza della Segnatura} is also decorated with tiles of Roman marble called cosmatesque.\textsuperscript{26} Joost-Gaugier suggests that the floor was decorated after the completion of the frescoes, and that its designs further reinforce the humanistic ideas presented in the wall and ceiling imagery, partially based on its subdivision of the room into fourths, relating to an important Pythagorean concept that was highly regarded by early modern scholars.\textsuperscript{27} However, the presence of Pope Nicholas V’s coat of arms within the floor design indicates that it predates Raphael’s frescoes, making it unlikely that it was designed to tie into the humanistic themes present in the frescoes.\textsuperscript{28} Nevertheless, we cannot discount the possibility that Raphael, Julius, and his advisor took into consideration the classical concepts of geometry that appear in the preexisting floor, and applied such concepts to the program of the walls and ceiling.

\textsuperscript{25} Joost-Gaugier, \textit{Raphael's Stanza Della Segnatura}, 1.
\textsuperscript{26} Rowland, "The Vatican Stanze," 111.
\textsuperscript{27} Joost-Gaugier, \textit{Raphael's Stanza Della Segnatura}, 147 – 152.
\textsuperscript{28} Rowland, "The Vatican Stanze," 111.
Figure 1.1 Raphael, Stanza della Segnatura, 1508 – 1511
1.1 DISPUTA

I now turn my discussion to the four main wall frescoes, describing their compositions and identification of the subjects in order to explore the inherent themes of humanism and Christianity. Following the example of other scholars, I will examine the frescoes in the order in which they were executed, starting with Disputa [Figure 1.2], also referred to as The Disputation of the Holy Sacrament. The names commonly attributed to the frescoes are not the names given to them by Raphael, which are unknown, but ones assigned by art historians in order to discuss the works coherently. The name Disputa is taken from Vasari, the first art historian to write an account of the Vatican stanze. Vasari suggested that the fresco depicts a debate about the holy sacrament, but later scholars have pointed to more probable interpretations of the painting as a depiction of “the triumph of theology” and “the original history of the church.” An account of the image’s composition will aid in determining some of the implications of the fresco’s meaning.

In the center of the Disputa Raphael has painted the Trinity. Christ sits on a throne of clouds, accompanied by intercessors - the Virgin on his right and Saint John the Baptist on his left. Above and behind Christ stands God the Father, his right hand engaged in an act of blessing while his left hand holds a blue orb. Below Christ the Holy Spirit is present in the form of a dove. The Holy Spirit is flanked on either side by two putti, each holding one of the four gospels. With this depiction, “Raphael announces, in essence, that these are the four most important books in the entire pontifical library.” This announcement can be understood as a declaration by Julius II that the gospels, and ultimately the will of God, are the foundations for

29 Joost-Gaugier, Raphael’s Stanza Della Segnatura, 65; Rowland, ”The Vatican Stanze,” 99; Konrad Oberhuber, Raphael: The Paintings (New York: Prestel, 1999), 86.
30 Joost-Gaugier, Raphael’s Stanza Della Segnatura, 66.
31 Rowland, ”The Vatican Stanze,” 101.
his decisions. Given the lust, greed, and self-interest that was blatantly displayed during the
papacy of Alexander IV, this seems to be an important statement of reformation – an implication
of the new Golden Age that Julius saw himself establishing in Rome.

The importance of angels in *Disputa* is made apparent not only by their sheer number, but
also by their order and placement. They can be found making up the cloud embankments, in the
golden background behind God the Father, and flanking him on either side. This unprecedented
emphasis on the celestial beings is likely a reference to two sources: Thomas Aquinas’ *Treatise
on Angels* (in his *Summa Theologica*, 1265 – 1274), and Dante’s *Divina Commedia* (1308 –
1321). In St. Thomas’s work, the Dominican priest “stresses the theological harmony created
by the substance, placement, and function of angels and their relation to the trinity.” Such a
relation is apparent in *Disputa*, as the placement and gesture of the angels serve to emphasize the
trinity and draw the viewer’s attention to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. St. Thomas was
highly regarded among Roman humanists, so a reference to his teachings can be considered a
reflection of both religious and humanist interests. The reference to Dante also served this dual
purpose. His poems were important for various humanists’ interest in the “revival of letters,”
and his theological themes satisfied the Christian expectations of sixteenth-century Rome. In
Dante’s *Paradiso*, Beatrice reveals the levels of angels to the poet, who sees them shimmering in
golden rays of light which radiate from God. In *Disputa*, Raphael appears to have depicted the
golden angelic rays that Dante described.

Sitting on the cloud embankment that forms a hemicycle just below Christ and his
intercessors, but still within the heavenly realm, are twelve figures. As with all the frescoes, the
identities of these twelve figures and the men below who represent the earthly realm have been

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32 Joost-Gaugier, *Raphael’s Stanza Della Segnatura*, 70.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
hotly debated by art historians, starting with Vasari’s attempt at identification. It is sufficient for my purposes to identify the figures on the cloud embankment generically as saints and evangelists, while also recognizing that Saint Peter and Saint Paul are on either end. The placement of these two saints is representative of their roles as patron saints of Rome, and even more specifically, Saint Peter’s role as the protector of the papacy.\footnote{Rowland, “The Vatican Stanze,” 101.}

Below this heavenly hemicycle sits the earthly realm, at the center of which lies an altar containing the monstrance and host. The gestures and poses of the figures in the earthly realm direct the viewer’s attention toward the altar, host, and four gospels; thereby emphasizing their importance to the fresco’s theme and the papacy of Julius II. The four Church Fathers, Saint Gregory and Saint Jerome on the left and Saint Augustine and Saint Ambrose on the right, are recognizable by the books that they hold – “Carefully represented by Raphael with titles, these volumes reflect works that were especially dear to Julius.”\footnote{Beck, Raphael: The Stanza Della Segnatura, 52; Joost-Gaugier, Raphael's Stanza Della Segnatura, 66.} The four Fathers were of particular importance to humanists. They were seen as forerunners of the humanist cause, as the Church Fathers of antiquity had also been educated in the classics and had to find ways of aligning them with their Christian dogma.\footnote{Joost-Gaugier, Raphael's Stanza Della Segnatura, 67.} Few of the remaining figures have been definitively identified, but several popes, and Dante [in the role of theologian, not poet] are thought to be on the right side of the painting.\footnote{Beck, Raphael: The Stanza Della Segnatura, 22.} In the distance behind the figures on the lower left side a building is under construction; this is likely a reference to the reconstruction of St. Peter’s, a reminder to the viewer of Julius’s power and his efforts to bring about Rome’s new Golden Age.\footnote{Ibid., 50.} The centrality of the gospels is underscored here; Julius presented an image of the Rome that he wanted to assert – a great city, founded on the gospels, and central to Christianity.
The *Disputa*, therefore, is a clear glorification of theology and the church, interspersed with humanistic references. The presence of the Church Fathers, the Eucharist, the Saints and Evangelists, and of course the Trinity is representative of all Christianity. Across the *stanza* from *Disputa*, engaged in a pictorial dialogue with it, is *School of Athens*. Talvacchia notes, “The ‘face-off’ between these two works is calculated to stress the interrelation of the two schools of thought, rather than to mark their opposition. In fact, the juxtaposition of the pagan and Christian eras, stressing the essential harmony, is perhaps the most eloquent statement of Julius’s dream of leading a new Rome.”\(^{40}\) The matching architectural elements of each fresco and Raphael’s trompe l’œil, which make the frescoes appear as if they are actually parts of the room’s architecture, reinforce this interrelation.\(^{41}\)

\(^{40}\) Talvacchia, *Raphael*, 90.

Figure 1.2 Raphael, *Disputa*, ca. 1508
1.2 SCHOOL OF ATHENS

School of Athens [Figure 1.3], one of Raphael’s most famous works, represents Philosophy. But, according to Ingrid Rowland, it was also “designed specifically to reveal the Christian truth latent in ancient wisdom.”\textsuperscript{42} Roman humanists, and perhaps even Pope Julius II himself, believed that Christ’s apostles were only able to comprehend the gospels because of the long tradition of classical learning and wisdom that had been passed down to them. Furthermore, the influence of the Roman Empire was understood to have been a critical instrument through which the apostles were able to spread the word of God; humanists felt that the empire’s advanced methods of transportation and communication had been pivotal in the dissemination of the Christian message.\textsuperscript{43} In this way, philosophy was not only complementary to theology in the eyes of the early modern Roman humanists, it was absolutely necessary: Rowland notes, “As an integral part of God’s plan, the creators of Julian Rome believed that ancient philosophy should merit not only their deep respect, but also their continued attention.”\textsuperscript{44} So while it was imperative that Pope Julius II uphold Christianity and the gospels as the foundation for his decisions and actions, it was also very advantageous for him politically and socially to laud classical philosophy.

While the identification of many of the figures in the image is a point of contention, the main theme of Philosophy is clear.\textsuperscript{45} Rather than depicting Philosophy allegorically, as was the artistic custom at the time, Raphael unprecedentedly depicted actual philosophers and classical scholars engaging in scholarly activities. Glenn Most explains, “[they] are all busily doing precisely what philosophers always do when they are acting as philosophers: they are reading,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Rowland, "The Vatican Stanze," 104.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Joost-Gaugier, Raphael's Stanza Della Segnatura, 12. The misidentification goes as far back as Vasari, who misidentified some of the figures as biblical persons.
\end{itemize}
writing, lecturing, arguing, demonstrating, questioning, listening, pondering, admiring, doubting."^46 Although all of the characters may not be conclusively identifiable, the two central figures are unquestionably Plato and Aristotle. Plato, on the left, wears red and holds his book *Timaeus*, while pointing to the heavens as an indication of his philosophical concerns with the divine. Aristotle, wearing blue and holding his book, *Ethics*, gestures to the earth as a signal of his interest in other modes of knowing and understanding.^47

To the modern viewer the pairing of Plato and Aristotle, of teacher and pupil, may seem like a perfectly natural combination of classical philosophers. But in the early modern period, a theoretical rift existed between the Neo-Platonists and Neo-Aristotelians. Joost-Gaugier notes that, “The Plato-Aristotle controversy of the mid-fifteenth century essentially divided the Greek, or Byzantine, world (the Platonists) from the Latin, or Western world (the Aristotelians).”^48 Byzantine theologians who resided in Italy argued that Plato’s teachings were superior to Aristotle’s, because Plato’s were based in ancient Hellenistic beliefs, while Aristotle’s were thought to be full of fallacy.^49 After much debate and some concessions by both sides, Petrarch suggested a solution, which Italian scholars expounded in the late Quattrocento. Petrarch proposed that Plato and Aristotle’s teachings could be understood both as equal and complementary. Plato’s concern with the divine realm and Aristotle’s study of nature and the senses, rather than being in opposition to each other, could be studied alongside each other to form a more complete canon of knowledge. Though it took some time, and the agency of subsequent scholars like Bessarion and Pico della Mirandola, for Petrarch’s idea of equality to be

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^46 Most, “Reading Raphael,” 146.
^48 Ibid., 89.
^49 Ibid.
accepted, the Plato-Aristotle schism was apparently resolved by the early sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{50}

Therefore, the equal attention paid to these two figures as the central subjects of \textit{School of Athens} has multivalent interpretations: On one level it refers to the new-found harmony of the two philosopher’s ideas, but on a more significant level this harmony emphasizes the alignment between humanism and Christianity.

Framed by the three tiers of vaults that again bring to mind the construction of the new St. Peter’s, Plato and Aristotle stand out as the two main subjects while also providing the visual impression of movement from within the building.\textsuperscript{51} The visual reference to St. Peter’s has a twofold purpose: to remind the viewer of Julius II’s prestigious patronage, and to create an impression that \textit{School of Athens} is “really an image of Rome under Julius II, a Christian kingdom.”\textsuperscript{52}

Raphael’s integration of the frescoed architecture within the actual architecture of the \textit{stanza} breathes life into the illusion that \textit{School of Athens} exists as a philosophical utopia within Julian Rome. Despite its strong humanist themes, there are references to Christianity throughout the fresco, balancing the relationship between the two in the same manner as \textit{Disputa}, and the entire \textit{stanza}.

On either side of the great vaulted hallway Raphael has painted a statue of a classical deity. Apollo appears on the viewer’s left and Athena/Minerva on the right.\textsuperscript{53} Joost-Gaugier suggests that the placement of these two mythological figures is part of the overall harmonious scheme of the room: Apollo, the god of music and poetry, is on the side of the fresco that is adjacent to the \textit{Parnassus}, while Athena, the goddess of wisdom, is on the side that neighbors

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 89 – 90.
\textsuperscript{51} Beck, \textit{Raphael: The Stanza Della Segnatura}, 82.
\textsuperscript{52} Rowland, “The Vatican Stanze,” 104.
\textsuperscript{53} Joost-Gaugier, \textit{Raphael’s Stanza Della Segnatura}, 96; Rowland, ”The Vatican Stanze,” 104.
Jurisprudence. Such careful orchestration on the part of the program’s designer demonstrates the attention to detail and meaningfulness in every aspect of the planning of the stanza.

Additionally, Apollo and Athena were understood by Roman humanists to be the precursors to the Christian deities Jesus Christ and the Virgin, respectively. Rowland explains, “Through the strong Neoplatonic tradition that underpins Christian theology from the Gospel of John through Saint Paul and Saint Augustine, many of Apollo’s associations as a young male god became associated with Christ.” This understanding brings further emphasis to the Parnassus wall, which will be discussed in detail below.

The mass of individuals that surround Plato and Aristotle are thought to contain such classical scholars as Socrates, Pythagoras, Euclid, and Epicurus, to name only a few. It is clear from the items that some of the figures hold that the topics of astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, and literature are just a few of the subjects under discussion. In response to Disputa, which glorifies theology, the School of Athens exemplifies philosophy, while also underscoring the relationship between the two ideologies. This relationship was of great interest to early modern humanists, who concerned themselves with finding a correlation between the two, in an effort to fit Classical learning into a Catholic framework. Regarding the relationship of the two frescoes, Bell surmises:

It has been suggested that there is a programmatic link between these two works [School of Athens and Disputa], and indeed, both seem to share a theme: the source of all knowledge lies with the divine. Some humanists further proposed that divine wisdom had been available to mankind in pre-Christian times, although imperfectly. In the Disputation, this wisdom was shown to be achieved through the study of theology and by participating in Christ's sacrifice as it is embodied in the Eucharist. In the School of Athens, spiritual illumination is

56 Ibid.
reached through the study of philosophy and science, coupled with a personal sense of altruism.  

Understood in this way, the frescoes succeed in transmitting a message of harmony between humanism and Catholicism, while still maintaining the dominance of the latter and reinforcing the importance of Julius’s position as pope. While Julian Rome was deeply embedded in Christian ideals, Julius also wanted to represent its classical foundations, the vast wealth of knowledge of which necessarily contributed to Rome’s Golden Age.

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Figure I.3 Raphael, *School of Athens*, ca. 1509 – 1510
1.3 PARNASSUS

For *Parnassus* [Figure 1.4], Raphael created an image that not only worked around the unfortunate placement of the window, but also worked with it to form the base of the hill of Parnassus. The fabled hill of Apollo and the Muses features the sun god as the central figure, accompanied by “contemporary poets, who mingle on Parnassus with the great poets of ancient Greece and Rome as if they had always been neighbors – and of course, on the shelves of the Vatican Library, they were.”59 The balance of the gospels and the philosophers as authorities was central to Julius’s view of himself as the champion of Rome’s new Golden Age; both Christianity and humanism were integral to achieving the Rome that Julius envisioned.

The seated figure of Apollo serves as the fresco’s focal point, with a proportionate arrangement of figures on either side of him. Apollo’s central position recognizes him as the god of poetry and song, but also identifies him as a Christ figure, a correlation made by humanists such as Giles of Viterbo.60 Additionally, just as *School of Athens* can be understood as a representation of Rome under the Golden Age of Pope Julius II, the imagery of *Parnassus* “suggested that the cultural life of Julian Rome was itself a vibrant new development of, and progress beyond, the ancient tradition.”61 The Rome that Pope Julius II saw himself responsible for building included the greatest Christian and humanistic triumphs, including poetry.

Surrounding the god of poetry, the Nine Muses accompany Apollo on his right and left. Scholars have convincingly identified Dante, Virgil, and Homer to Apollo’s far right (the viewer’s left).62 The presence of these celebrated poets, among others, is a direct appeal to humanism’s interest in the revival of letters. Rowland notes, “Of all forms of literature, [poetry]
was the one Raphael and his contemporaries, like the ancients before them, considered most divinely inspired.”

This relationship between poetry and the divine is emphasized by the view of Vatican Hill, which was visible through the window below the fresco at the time of its execution, and made further reference to the patron’s assertion of papal and social authority.

On the lower left side of the fresco, leaning against the window frame as if it were truly a part of the composition, is Sappho of Lesbos, identifiable by the scroll she holds in her left hand. Her name is displayed with the Latin spelling, versus the Italian “Saffo,” reinforcing the classical setting of the fresco.

The ancient Greek poetess invites the viewer to ascend Mount Parnassus, through her twisting posture and pointed gaze, while the identifying scroll underscores her importance to the scene; she is the only figure to be identified by text in this fresco.

Sappho would have been well-known in the court of Pope Julius II – perhaps even better known in the Cinquecento than in previous centuries; Roman humanists regarded her as “the first poetess and…the probable inventor of lyric poetry through Greek and Roman works that played a vital role in defining classical antiquity.”

Significantly, a humanist encyclopedia written by Raffaele Maffei and dedicated to Pope Julius II, appeared in Rome in 1506, containing a biography of Sappho. The poetess’s role as the fresco’s anchor elevates her classical poetry to the lofty heights of Apollo’s hill (and by extension, Christ’s) and highlights the importance of her contributions to early modern humanistic scholarship.

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64 Joost-Gaugier, Raphael’s Stanza Della Segnatura, 116.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 118.
67 Ibid., 122.
Sappho’s presence is visually balanced by the seated figure on the right side of the window, identified as either Pindar or Horace. Scholars have been unable to agree on the poet’s identity, but either association would invoke either humanistic or papal themes which tie into the overall message of the stanza, and the geometric triangle created by Sappho, Apollo, and Pindar/Horace reinforces the trinity motif introduced by Disputa. The lushness of the landscape and the fluid movement of the figures lend an aura to the image that complements the literary art this fresco represents: Poetry.

68 Joost-Gaugier, Raphael’s Stanza Della Segnatura, 125; Beck, Raphael: The Stanza Della Segnatura, 65. Joost-Gaugier identifies this figure as Pindar, while Beck identifies him as Horace. Other scholars variously describe him as one or the other, or as unidentifiable.

69 Oberhuber suggests that an identification of the figure as Horace could refer to his praise of Caesar Augustus, “the predecessor of the popes in Rome,” and that his pointed finger is meant to gesture towards Julius when he was in the room, Oberhuber, Raphael: The Paintings, 105. Joost-Gaugier maintains that the figure is Pindar, whom she calls “the master inventor of a rich new form of narrative poetry that reshaped ancient ideas,” Joost- Gaugier, Raphael’s Stanza Della Segnatura, 130.
Figure 1.4 Raphael, *Parnassus*, ca. 1510 - 1511
1.4 JURISPRUDENCE

Across the stanza from Parnassus is Jurisprudence [Figure 1.5]. Pope Julius II had studied canon law before coming to Rome, so a section of his library dedicated to legal texts accords well with the new pope’s program of establishing his identity. Additionally, this choice reinforces the themes of authority that Julius establishes within the stanza. Taking the constraints of the preexisting window into account, Raphael divided Jurisprudence into three structurally separate parts. In the top register, the artist created a lunette featuring three “statuesque female figures who represent the three essential components of justice as they are detailed in Plato’s Republic: Strength (Fortitude), Temperance, and Prudence.” Fortitude, recognizable by the lion in her lap and on her right boot, contains several references to Julius. The military references that are apparent in Fortitude’s armor put her “in rapport with Pope Julius II,” while the oak tree she grasps serves as a symbol of the della Rovere family. Prudence, in the middle, has a double-face and holds a mirror to represent her foresight, while Temperance holds a set of reins to maintain control and restraint. These are likely references to Julius, as well, suggesting that he was a ruler who possessed self-discipline and sound judgment. This is another indication of the identity that Julius wanted to make for himself.

The two lower images demonstrate the two types of law in place in Early Modern Europe: civil law and canon law. Raphael has depicted “the moment when the completed texts of two great law codes…are handed over to the monarchs who commissioned them by the jurist who bore chief responsibility for their compilation.” On the right Pope Gregory IX receives the code of canon law. Julius II clearly posed for the portrait of the thirteenth-century pope,

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70 Joost-Gaugier, Raphael’s Stanza Della Segnatura, 136.
72 Beck, Raphael: The Stanza Della Segnatura, 72.
73 Rowland, “The Vatican Stanze,” 110.
74 Ibid., 109.
asserting that his image is analogous with that of his esteemed predecessor. On the left, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian receives the civil code. Joost-Gaugier explains, “This scene illustrates the return of Roman law to a barbarized world, allowing for a unity of Church and state.” This unity reflects upon the relationship between humanism and Christianity, which is the overarching theme that is represented in all of the frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura.

The depiction of Justinian likely had additional significance for Pope Julius II. In the sixth century Justinian attempted to unite the eastern and western world under the Roman Empire, in essence not only restoring, but also increasing the glory and authority of Rome. Julius shared similar aims of reinstating the greatness of the Roman Empire, as well as a deep respect for Roman law, which Justinian tried to institute as the official law within the Empire during his reign. Clearly, Julius also identified himself with his papal predecessor and fellow Franciscan, Gregory IX. In 1231 Pope Gregory IX lifted the ban on studying Aristotle at the University of Paris, allowing theologians such as Thomas Aquinas to study his teachings and write about the classical philosopher’s *Ethics* and *Politics*; both works were owned and likely valued by Julius. Additionally, Julius shared some of the same foreign troubles as Gregory IX, particularly with the rulers of France during their respective pontificates. Joost-Gaugier explains, “The historical and philosophical background that Julius shared with Gregory in his attempts to make the Papal State the most important power in Italy therefore provides good reason…for the portrayal of Julius as Gregory.” It also demonstrates the pope’s desire to

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75 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 140 – 141.
80 Ibid., 141.
embed his identity in the frescoes, in the same manner that the frescoes were part of his attempt to insert his legacy into the history of the Roman Empire.

These frescoes, while depicting the four main classifications of Pope Julius II’s library, also subtly represent through a variety of iconographical techniques how Early Modernists reconciled humanism with Christianity. Through the themes depicted in the frescoes of the Stanza della Segnatura, Julius strove to portray himself as a new Julius Caesar, an inaugurator of the Golden Age of Rome, and an authority capable of restoring the Roman Empire to its former glory. The Stanza della Segnatura was just one of many great works of art he commissioned during his reign as pope, but its intricate weaving of humanism and classical references is pointedly representative of its patron and the manner in which he wanted to be thought of, both during his lifetime and well after.
Figure 1.5 Raphael, *Jurisprudence*, ca. 1511
2 THE WARRIOR POPE

A discussion of the life and career of Pope Julius II is pertinent for understanding the guiding force behind the commission of the Stanza della Segnatura, and how the themes represented within the stanza aligned with Julius’s political goals to usher in a new Golden Age and create a legacy for himself. A brief analysis of Julius’s character is also in order, as his insistence on doing everything for himself reinforces my argument that he played more than a minor role in determining the program of the Stanza della Segnatura.\(^{81}\)

Julius was born Giuliano della Rovere. His birth date (and birth year) is not definitely known, but Shaw believes it is probably December 15, 1445.\(^{82}\) Born to “impoverished but noble parents,” Giuliano’s career path was significantly aided by his relation to Pope Sixtus IV, who was born Francisco della Rovere.\(^{83}\) Like his uncle, Giuliano was a Franciscan, and received his education at a Franciscan monastery. He was educated in civil (Roman) law, but likely also studied canon law. Shaw maintains that he was “no great scholar, though he had wide and cultivated tastes.”\(^{84}\) Several authors have made reference to an anecdote passed down from Vasari’s Lives of the Artists, which recounts an interaction between Julius and Michelangelo, as an indication that Julius was not very learned in the humanities. While working on a sculpture of Julius in Bologna, after Julius freed it from its tyrannical leader, Michelangelo asked Julius if he wanted to be depicted with a book or a sword in his hand, to which Julius purportedly replied,

\(^{81}\) Pope Julius II’s involvement in the fresco cycle is another point of contention among scholars. Several, such as Joost-Gaugier, are of the opinion that the pope's involvement in the fresco program was either limited or non-existent, and that the author of the program was solely and exclusively an advisor.
\(^{82}\) Shaw, Julius II, 10.
\(^{84}\) Shaw, Julius II, 10.
“Put a sword there. I know nothing of books.” Joost-Gaugier declares that in spite of this, “the pope’s limited expertise in humanistic learning was more than compensated for by his determination to encourage its development through others.” The completed statue of the pope held neither a sword nor a book, instead, Michelangelo depicted the pope’s hand raised in a gesture of blessing. This serves as an indication that the story Vasari presented may not have much truth behind it, so we cannot assume that the pope’s knowledge of humanistic teachings was lacking or inadequate. Despite the incalculable value of Vasari’s Lives as a resource for art historians, many recent scholars have questioned the methodology and veracity of his work. Critiques of Vasari’s Lives have referred to it as “factual reportage laced with anecdote” and “poetic invention yet a historical document.” As David Ekserdjian notes, “Very little about the Lives should be taken on trust.”

After becoming a Franciscan in 1468, Pope Sixtus IV made Giuliano a cardinal in 1471. Already at this point Giuliano displayed an affinity for constructing buildings and commissioning art; while he was a cardinal he constructed three Roman palaces, acquired a large collection of sculptures, and commissioned a monumental bronze sepulcher for his uncle Sixtus IV after his death in 1484. Through bribery, Giuliano assisted in the election of Innocent VIII.
as successor to Sixtus, since Giuliano himself was too young to be considered for the position at the time of the conclave in 1484. Giuliano proceeded to exert a large amount of persuasion over Pope Innocent VIII. Frederic Baumgartner refers to him as Innocent’s “right-hand man,” explaining, “Innocent was among the least aggressive popes of the era, and what warlike activity took place during his reign is attributed to della Rovere’s influence.”

When Innocent died in 1492, Giuliano hoped to succeed him in the papacy, garnering the support of the French king Charles VIII, amongst others. However, a Spanish cardinal, Roderigo Borgia, was elected through extensive bribery, and took the name Pope Alexander VI. Although Giuliano and Alexander VI seem to have shared a polite rivalry up to this point, they apparently had a vehement argument on the deathbed of Innocent VIII, which resulted in them becoming bitter enemies. In 1493 Alexander banished Giuliano to Ostia, and later in that same year the future warrior pope fled to France out of fear of being assassinated by Alexander. In France Giuliano attempted to rally King Charles VIII’s support for removing Alexander from the papacy on account of simony, but failed in these efforts. Upon Alexander’s death in 1503 Giuliano headed back to Rome after ten years of exile, writing to the cardinals and “demanding that they not enter the conclave until he arrived.” Despite his efforts Giuliano was not elected; the papacy went instead to the “prematurely old” and sickly Pius III. When Pius did not live a month past his coronation, Giuliano finally succeeded in being elected pope at the next conclave, taking on the name Julius II. Through bribery and

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95 Ibid.
97 Shaw, Julius II, 81 – 82.
99 McBrien, Lives of the Popes, 270.
promises he would later break, he was elected in a single day by a unanimous vote. Shortly thereafter he issued a bull banning simony in papal elections.

The name Julius is seemingly taken from Pope Julius I, a fourth-century pope. But some historians believe it is more likely that Julius II took his name as a reference to Julius Caesar. Baumgartner notes: “Undoubtedly [Pope Julius II] came to think of his office, if not himself, as imperial. One of the many examples to make the point was the medal cast to celebrate his victory at Bologna, which was inscribed *Iulius Caesar Pont. II.*” Identification with the Roman general would certainly be corroborated by Pope Julius II’s aggressive foreign policy and apparent preoccupation with bringing about a new Golden Age in Rome.

Julius regarded restoration of the Papal States, “which had been reduced to ruin by the Borgias” as his primary task. The papacy of Alexander VI had had a promising start; he had restored order in Rome and waged a crusade against the Turks. But it soon became apparent that his greed, lust, and interest in increasing his family’s wealth and status took precedence over the wellbeing of Rome and the Church. Reform was clearly in order for the next pope, Julius II. This focus on reform may help explain why Julius refused to reside in Alexander’s living quarters in the Vatican palace, even if the Borgia decorations could have painted over, as was suggested by his Master of Ceremonies, Paris de’Grassis. He demanded a new residence on the third floor of the Vatican, where he could commission his own art that was a reflection of himself and his papal principles, as is the case in the *Stanza della Segnatura.*

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102 Ibid., 270.
107 Kühner, "Julius II.”
Pope Julius II not only restored the Papal States, but he also enlarged them. He forced Casare Borgia, Alexander VI’s son, out of Italy. Additionally, he won back most of Romagna and freed Perugia and Bologna from their tyrant leaders, riding into battle himself.\textsuperscript{110} In 1508 he established the League of Cambria, which allied France, Spain, Germany, and Rome against Venice.\textsuperscript{111} All of his military efforts served the two-fold purpose of enhancing his papal prestige and expanding the Holy Roman Empire. His military endeavors and his insistence on being present on the battlefield earned him the nickname “the Warrior Pope.”\textsuperscript{112}

In 1507 the newly appointed Augustinian general, Giles of Viterbo, delivered a sermon at St. Peter’s, in which he addressed Pope Julius II and the new Golden Age of Rome.\textsuperscript{113} In this speech Giles compared Julius II to Julius Caesar, but proclaimed that the pope had “vastly surpassed” the ancient Roman general through his acquisition of lands and expansion of Rome.\textsuperscript{114} It was at this time that “Julius must have decided, doubtless in a gesture of imperial munificence, to continue the work of his predecessor Sixtus IV by further embellishing the Vatican.”\textsuperscript{115} While Pope Julius II is often remembered for his military efforts, he is perhaps even better remembered as a patron of the arts, a responsibility that would have been necessary for him to take on in order to bring about Rome’s new Golden Age.

Pope Julius II’s other well-known nickname, \textit{Il Papa Terribile} (“The Fearsome Pope”), is indicative of his political choices as well as his personality. Baumgartner addresses the presentist interpretation of this epithet and explains that “terrible” in the early modern period was not an indication of evil, but rather meant that Julius was strong-willed, forceful, determined, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} McBrien, \textit{Lives of the Popes}, 270.
\item \textsuperscript{111} McBrien, \textit{Lives of the Popes}, 271; Baumgartner, “Julius II: Prince, Patron, Pastor,” 17.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Baumgartner, “Julius II: Prince, Patron, Pastor,” 16.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Baumgartner, “Julius II: Prince, Patron, Pastor,” 21.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Joost-Gaugier, \textit{Raphael’s Stanza Della Segnatura}, 10.
\end{itemize}
awe-inspiring.\textsuperscript{116} In Shaw’s lengthy biography she refers to Julius as a “megalomaniac pope.”\textsuperscript{117} His ego certainly makes itself apparent in his biography, with his imperialistic attitude and his comparison of himself to Julius Caesar. An account from a Venetian ambassador reports that “Julius lacked the patience to listen to what others were saying and that his mind was always racing ahead of what he was being told. He rarely consulted anyone, and the few whom he did consult had little influence on him. He preferred to do everything himself.”\textsuperscript{118} This account may be somewhat suspect coming from a Venetian, but even if it is an exaggeration it certainly must be founded in some truth as to the nature of Julius’s personality.\textsuperscript{119} It is quite inconceivable that a man of such obstinacy, conceit, and stubbornness would have allowed an advisor to create the program for the \textit{Stanza della Segnatura} without his input and direction. This is especially true when we consider the room’s intended function as his library, adjacent to his bedroom, where he would presumably have spent a fair amount of his personal time. Furthermore, the themes in the \textit{stanza}, with the interrelationship of Christian and humanistic ideologies, align with the pope’s political goals to the point that Julius’s strong involvement in the program almost becomes unquestionable. The envelopment of classical philosophy within Christian thought corresponds with Pope Julius II’s imperialistic efforts to absorb more land within the Roman Empire. One of Julius’s main political goals was the restoration and expansion of Rome. The reconciliation of Christian and humanistic ideologies, represented in the \textit{Stanza della Segnatura}, was essentially an expansion of these two belief systems.

Baumgartner explains that, as an Italian pope in the early sixteenth century, Julius had three primary roles to fulfill: “those of ruler of the Papal States and a major power of Italy, 

\textsuperscript{116} Baumgartner, “Julius II: Prince, Patron, Pastor,” 12.
\textsuperscript{117} Shaw, \textit{Julius II}, 199.
\textsuperscript{118} Baumgartner, “Julius II: Prince, Patron, Pastor,” 15.
\textsuperscript{119} Pope Julius II was responsible for creating the League of Cambrai in 1508, an anti-Venetian alliance which aimed at restraining Venice’s power in Northern Italy. Shaw, \textit{Julius II}, 209 – 244.
supreme pastor of the Catholic Church, and patron of art and letters.”

Taking these roles into consideration while examining the themes in the Stanzadella Segnatura reveals a parallel – Julius’s papal responsibilities, which balance Catholic duties and humanistic patronage, correlate with the interweaving of Christian ideals and humanistic concerns found in the stanza. The humanistic exemplification of classical art and letters is apparent in the imagery of the frescoes, and signifies the third role of the pope as outlined by Baumgartner. Shaw concurs that Julius’s patronage of visual arts was an integral part of his legacy as “the epitome of a Renaissance pope.”

In the decades immediately following his reign as pope, Julius II “became a symbol of what Protestants condemned about Rome, but for many Catholics as well, he epitomized everything that needed reforming in the papacy.” While Julius may not have been able to find the perfect balance between godly/Christian needs and secular needs during his papacy, such a balance can be found in the frescoes of the Stanzadella Segnatura. The balance and interrelationship of religious and humanistic ideologies can be seen as a projection of the pope’s ideals for his own political career, and how he desired to be remembered. Kühner acknowledges that “Spiritual references to the person and the pontificate of Julius II are evident in [the Stanzadella Segnatura], where earthly and celestial wisdom are juxtaposed in the School of Athens and the Disputa, while the beauty of creativity is represented in the Parnassus.” Although his nicknames, such as “The Warrior Pope” and Il Papa Terribile, recall a pope who is remembered

120 Baumgartner, “Julius II: Prince, Patron, Pastor,” 16.
121 Shaw, Julius II, 1.
122 Baumgartner, “Julius II: Prince, Patron, Pastor,” 28. Julius II was criticized by both Protestants and Catholics for his aggressive foreign policy and the dishonest manner in which he was elected pope, among other reasons.
123 Kühner, "Julius II."
for his military efforts and ill-temper, today he is also remembered as the “greatest art patron of the papal line” – an identification that I assert the *Stanza della Segnatura* helped to establish.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
3 HUMANISM IN EARLY MODERN ROME

In order to understand fully how the interplay of humanism and Christianity in the Stanza della Segnatura worked for Pope Julius II’s political aims, it is essential to examine the characteristics of humanism, and how humanism functioned within early modern Italian and Roman society. I will now briefly discuss the history of humanism in Rome, and how humanists created a framework for their ideologies within the preexisting dogma of Catholicism. I will also look at the presence of humanistic themes alongside Christian imagery in the ceiling frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, for the purpose of further comprehending the themes found in the Stanza della Segnatura.

Humanists, at least in the early modern application of the word, concerned themselves with the study of classical Greek and Roman literature, history, art, and architecture. The writings of Plato and Aristotle, and their followers, were of particular interest to humanists. The study of classical civilizations was significant to humanists because it presented a fresh and newly intellectual way to understand contemporary society and societal concerns. Humanism emphasized the intellect and power of man, while Christian dogma is centered on the glorification of the power of God. Although humanism was an intellectual movement, and not a religious movement in direct competition with Christianity, the potential for conflict was still present: D’Amico explains, “As a comprehensive cultural movement, humanism naturally had to contend with the religious precepts of its day. In this there was always the possibility of tension, since humanism was essentially a secular movement concerned with human acts separate from any metaphysical or theological implications.”

126 Ibid.
Until recent centuries, scholars who studied humanism in early modern Italy paid their closest attention to Florence, the birthplace and epicenter of early modern humanism. While Roman humanism can rightly be considered a derivative of Florentine humanism, it took form in its own way by adapting to the curial society within Rome. Florentine humanism was extremely secular, since the republican nature of Florence’s city-state allowed the movement to develop autonomously. Meanwhile, Roman humanists were forced to interweave their philosophies within the Christian dogma that dominated the city of the papal seat. Despite their best efforts to “reconcile classical values and Christian truths,” humanists in Rome, and Rome itself, were still subject to criticism from theologians who stigmatized the city as a nucleus of paganism. The popes, however, generally did not have a problem with humanism despite, “objections to the ‘pagan’ tendencies of humanists [that] were made by some theologians.”

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, while the papal residence was still in Avignon, Rome had fallen into decay. By many accounts, it was “pervaded by rusticity” and was “a cultural backwater.” The turning point came with the restoration of the papacy to Rome and the resolution of the schism, when Martin V was elected pope in 1420. Although his successor was absent from Rome for a ten-year period, the papacy of Eugenius IV secured the
papal seat’s permanence in Rome one again in 1443. Even though some humanists resided in Rome prior to this, it was at this starting point that “Roman humanism developed from a fragile Florentine transplant into the dominant Italian form.” Due to the restoration of the papacy and the revival of the arts, scholars beginning with Vasari have referred to this time period as Rome’s “rebirth” – one of several stimuli that led to the application of the term “Renaissance” as a classification for this period of growth and renewal. As the de facto leaders of Rome, it was therefore a critical task for the popes to restore the city to its former glory.

Early modern Roman society was a hierarchy, and the pope was at the top of that hierarchy. With few exceptions, such as Paul II, the popes did not necessarily support humanism, but rather looked at it in a practical manner, recognizing the potential administrative and political benefits that humanism could offer.” The wide range of responses to humanism – from suspicion (Pope Paul II), to indifference, to acceptance (Pope Pius II) – underscores the intricacy of its interaction with Christianity. This makes the harmonious relationship of the subject matter in the Stanza della Segnatura that much more significant.

The curia often employed humanists, mostly as clerks, because of their education and knowledge of Latin. Early modern Romans viewed the restoration of Rome as a fulfillment of Rome’s destiny. It was therefore strategic for Rome’s leaders to at least use humanism to their advantage. Partner, for example, notes:

The relation of the papacy to the new humanist learning of the Renaissance period was central to the papal mission. The hegemony of the Roman Church in Europe was essentially that of a cultural elite. It was dependent

135 Ibid.
137 Kramer, review of Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects by Vasari, 234.
138 D’Amico, Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome, 8.
139 Stinger, The Renaissance in Rome, 7.
140 Ibid., 6.
on literary communication and on the effective transmission of ideas as well as on the preservation of popular religious and cultural patterns.\[^{141}\]

In the same manner that the popes realized the advantages of employing humanists, humanists recognized their dependence on the papacy and the curia as patrons, making sure to employ careful applications of classical studies within Roman Christian society. Bouwsma explains, “The dependence of humanists in Rome on the patronage of pope and cardinals put a premium on orthodoxy and limited discourse to subjects considered safe.”\[^{142}\] While early humanists such as Salutati, Poggio, and Bruni displayed an aversion to theology because they did not see it correlating to their human interests, late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Roman humanists adapted to find such an interrelation. Humanists discovered aspects of classical mythology and philosophy that neatly corresponded with Biblical text, and saw the renewal of contemporary Rome as a natural and correct progression in accordance with the rise of ancient Rome.\[^{143}\]

Stinger explains, “The humanists discovered in paleo-Christian and Hebraic antiquity important precedents for underscoring the religious centrality of the papal office, and they affirmed the unique sanctity of the city of Rome, particularly the Vatican region, from earliest times.”\[^{144}\] Clearly, it was mutually advantageous for humanism to adapt to Christian models, and for Christian leaders to acknowledge humanistic learning for the greater good of Rome, and themselves.

Pope Sixtus IV, in an effort to create a Rome that would rival Florence as a cultural metropolis and restore it to its classical glory, commissioned the construction of the Sistine Chapel and established the Vatican library.\[^{145}\] Pope Julius II, following in the footsteps of his


\[^{142}\] Bouwsma, review of *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome* by D’Amico, 105.

\[^{143}\] Talvacchia, *Raphael*, 84.

\[^{144}\] Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, xiv.

uncle, commissioned the painting of the Sistine Chapel, the frescoes of the Vatican Stanze, and the rebuilding of Saint Peters’ basilica “as a symbolic statement of the achievements and aims of the Roman Church as he saw them.”\textsuperscript{146} Clearly set on ushering in the new Golden Age of Rome, Julius II commissioned works that “fulfilled the loftiest aims of both civilization and Christianity.”\textsuperscript{147} One strategy he employed was the selection of humanistic themes alongside Christian images within both the Vatican Stanze and the decoration of the Sistine Chapel. This served the two-fold purpose of aiding in the restoration of the church in Rome while also renewing the Roman Empire. It is no accident that these acts also reinforced Julius II’s public and private identity as the new Julius Caesar.

The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel [Figure 3.1], painted by Michelangelo between 1508 and 1512, is another work commissioned by Julius that contains both religious and humanistic themes.\textsuperscript{148} A brief discussion of this work, contemporaneous with the \textit{Stanza della Segnatura}, will help to demonstrate how Julius utilized the relationships between humanism and Christianity for his political aims and identity.

The main ceiling fresco cycle, starting from the altar and reading backwards towards the chapel entrance, depicts scenes from the book of Genesis; the creation of earth and the first humans, the fall of man, and the resulting plight of humanity, specifically the great flood.\textsuperscript{149} Clearly these represent religious subjects. The surrounding frescoes, however, contain alternating Biblical and classical figures, all of which were believed to have prophesized the coming of Christ.\textsuperscript{150} At first the presence of classical figures among the Biblical narratives might

\textsuperscript{146} Partner, \textit{Renaissance Rome}, 181.
\textsuperscript{147} Stinger, \textit{The Renaissance in Rome}, xiv.
\textsuperscript{148} Shaw, \textit{Julius II}, 198.
\textsuperscript{149} Stinger, \textit{The Renaissance in Rome}, 314.
seem enigmatic or even counter-intuitive, until one considers the humanistic impetus behind such a depiction. The five sibyls, “prophetic women of the pagan world, were of special interest to Renaissance thinkers.”\textsuperscript{151} By choosing to have Michelangelo depict these classical figures alongside the great accomplishments of God, Pope Julius II emphasizes the role of humanism in Rome’s new Golden Age, while still maintaining that the gospel is the foundation of Rome’s greatness.\textsuperscript{152} Additionally, the appearance of the sibyls intermingled with Biblical figures reinforces the humanistic assertions that classical thinking presaged Christianity – “the foreshadowings of Christian doctrine in pagan philosophers and poets.”\textsuperscript{153}

Like the \textit{Stanza della Segnatura}, but to a lesser degree, the imagery of the Sistine Chapel illustrates the relationship between humanism and Catholicism, and highlights the fact that such a relationship is integral to reestablishing Rome’s greatness as the pinnacle of the Christian and human world. The differences between philosophical and religious ideas, between “pagan” and Christian concepts, do not conflict with each other but, instead, harmonize. The unity of classical and Catholic ideologies is exemplary of the reunification of Rome, for which Julius envisioned himself being responsible.

\textsuperscript{151} Esther Gordon Dotson, "An Augustinian Interpretation of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling, Part II," \textit{The Art Bulletin} 61, no. 3 (September 1979), 405.
\textsuperscript{152} Shaw, \textit{Julius II}, 197.
\textsuperscript{153} Dotson, "An Augustinian Interpretation of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling, Part II," 407.
Figure 3.1 Michelangelo, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, 1508 – 1512
CONCLUSION

Pope Julius II was a strong-willed and obstinate pope, determined to restore the papal states to their former glory and expand the Roman Empire in an attempt to usher in a new Golden Age. Julius saw it as his paramount goal to return Rome to its classical greatness – this was the impetus for his aggressive foreign policy and for commissioning grandiose works of art and architecture. Roman humanism was also a necessary part of establishing Rome’s new Golden Age, and Pope Julius II was acutely aware of this, as evidenced by the strong humanistic themes that appear alongside Christian subjects in the Stanza della Segnatura. The manner in which the frescoes’ imagery reflects Julius’s political aims and identity-projection, Julius’ unyielding determination to do everything himself, and his role as patron all indicate that he was strongly involved with the stanza’s program.

The commission of the stanza and the emphasis on the relationship between humanism and Christianity served Julius’s political aims to represent a particular image of the Rome he felt he had created – central to Christianity and founded on Biblical principles, but also grand and rich in culture. The Stanza della Segnatura also projects an image of the pope as a new Julius Caesar and an ideal Renaissance pope. The balance of Christian and secular ideals displayed within the fresco’s imagery is representative of Julius’s goals for his pontificate. Although in his own time he was remembered more for his warlike tendencies, today “the Warrior Pope” is also recognized as the pope responsible for commissioning some of the greatest works from the early modern period – the new St. Peter’s, the Sistine Chapel ceiling, and the Vatican stanze.


